

Congressman Michaud Sponsors Historic "E-Hearing" on Jobs in the U.S. Auto Industry

Monday, December 05 2005

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Representative

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"The U.S. auto industry is preparing to cut jobs, wages, healthcare, and pensions, with awful consequences for American workers and their families," said Congressman Michaud. "These workers have a right to be heard - and Washington, D.C., needs to hear from them. That's why I am cosponsoring this e-hearing."

"Maine has lost 23 percent of our manufacturing base in the last three years alone. Unemployment in certain areas has reached as high as 30 percent," Michaud said. "We must do everything possible to stop the hemorrhaging of manufacturing jobs throughout America."

Over the next two weeks, the lawmakers will solicit e-testimony from current and retired workers of Delphi and General Motors. Witnesses may submit e-testimony through Thursday, December 15, 2005. Local elected officials, union leaders, economists, and representatives of GM and Delphi have also been invited to submit testimony.

On October 8, Delphi Corporation, an auto parts maker based in Troy, Michigan, filed for bankruptcy. The company, which has 33,000 workers in the U.S., has since announced wage cuts of up to 60 percent, and has threatened to dump its pension plans onto the federal government. Delphi has also indicated that it may close some U.S. plants.

On November 21, General Motors announced that it would close nine plants in the U.S., leading to the elimination of 30,000 American jobs. GM's pension plan may face dramatic new

liabilities and freeze pensioners' benefits if pending pension legislation supported by the House leadership, H.R. 2830, becomes law. While GM has agreed to pick up some portion of Delphi's liabilities if Delphi terminates its pension or retiree health plan, industry analysts have cautioned that GM may also be headed for bankruptcy, putting both GM and Delphi workers' benefits at risk.

"What you don't hear in these news stories packed with business statistics are the real-life stories of workers who could lose their jobs, their pensions, their healthcare, and everything they've spent a lifetime working for. Those GM and Delphi workers have families to support and mortgages to pay. How will these changes affect them? That's what we want to hear from them about," said Congressman Michaud.

This is the third e-hearing that has been held this year. The first e-hearing - which was also the first e-hearing in history - was launched in May to give employees and retirees of United Airlines a chance to testify about how that company's bankruptcy has affected them. Over 2,000 United employees and retirees took part, and over 400 pieces of testimony were posted online.

The hearing is being sponsored by Democrats, who are using the Internet to conduct hearings for two reasons. First, the e-hearings make it possible for people all over the country to participate at no or little expense and on their own schedules. Second, only the majority can convene formal live hearings, but wage and employment issues have frequently been given light coverage in Congress.

The Democratic lawmakers sponsoring this e-hearing will write and distribute a report based on the testimony they receive, and they will enter the testimony into the official Congressional Record.

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